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Grammaticalization of *Shuo* and *Jiang* in Singapore Mandarin Chinese: A Spoken-Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the extended grammatical uses of the speech act verbs 说 *shuo* ‘say’ and 讲 *jiang* ‘say’ in Singapore Mandarin Chinese (SMC). With data from a contemporary spoken corpus, this study finds that while both 说 and 讲 are the major speech act verbs in SMC, 说 has been more grammatically extended than 讲 not only in SMC, but also its counterparts in other Mandarin varieties and Chinese dialects. This study argues that the extension has been motivated by both language-external and language-internal factors. The findings of this study will not only contribute to the typology of speech act verbs and their grammaticalization in general, but also the study of language variations and changes.

1 Introduction

The extended uses of speech act verbs (or SAY verbs) have been discussed in a good number of literature on a variety of languages. For the Chinese language, it has been observed that different dialects tend to adopt different speech act verbs, e.g., 说 ‘say’ in the Northern, 话 ‘say’ in the Southern, and 讲 ‘say’ in the middle (Wang 2003). Moreover, these speech act verbs have undergone different degrees of grammaticalization and have acquired different functions, e.g., as a complementizer, a topic marker, or a conjunction (Dong 2003, Fang 2006, Chappell 2008, among others).

The contemporary Singapore Mandarin Chinese (SMC) shares the major linguistic features

with Mainland China Mandarin Chinese (MMC), but exhibits a variety of features that are to a great extent either triggered by the properties of SMC itself or motivated by language contact to local dominant languages such as English and Malay and local Chinese dialects such as Min (Southern Min, Teochew, Hainanese, etc.) and Cantonese (Lin et al. 2018). The two major speech act verbs 说 *shuo* and 讲 *jiang* in SMC are among the ones that show special features different from the other varieties of standard Mandarin, e.g., MMC and Taiwanese Mandarin Chinese (TMC). For instance, while both 说 and 讲 can appear as discourse markers such as 说/讲真的 ‘honestly speaking’ and (我)跟你说/讲 ‘I say to you’, SMC prefers 讲 over 说, whereas MMC has an opposite preference.

Furthermore, in SMC, 说 frequently occurs after another verb and functions as a complementizer to turn an independent clause into an argument of a predicate. As illustrated in (1a) and (1b) respectively, 说 introduces the clauses 每天都吃很多 ‘eat (it) a lot every day’ and 我们女人的疑心病很重 ‘we as women are highly skeptical’ as the objects of the verbs 建议 ‘suggest’ and 觉得 ‘think’. However, neither 讲 in SMC nor 说/讲 in MMC is commonly found in such a use.

- (1) a. 其实我也不**建议说**每天都吃很多因为它是一种高能量的嘛 (xmbdwt4-ep7) ‘Actually I don’t suggest that you eat it a lot every day, because it is high-calorie.’
b. 所以你们男人就**觉得说**我们女人的疑心病很重 (jxhxdbt-ep5) ‘So you guys think that we as women are highly skeptical.’

There are few studies that focus on the meanings, functions, and distributions of 说 and 讲 in SMC, or compare these two with their counterparts in other varieties of Mandarin or Chinese dialects. This study aims to fill this gap with a spoken-corpus-based investigation of 说 and 讲 in SMC. By comparisons with MMC and Chinese dialects, this study proposes that the speech act verb 说 in SMC has grammaticalized to a further degree than its counterparts and cognates. Furthermore, this study argues that the variations that SMC displays are triggered by both language external and internal factors.

The rest of this paper consists of the following: Section 2 presents the extended uses of 说 and 讲 in SMC. In Section 3, this paper focuses on their uses as a (semi-)complementizer and discusses the motivations that may have led to the special features of exhibited by 说 and 讲 in SMC. Section 4 concludes the whole study.

2 说 and 讲 in SMC

2.1 Extended uses of speech act verbs in Chinese dialects

Speech act verbs have been observed to undergo grammaticalization in many languages in the world. (2) presents the possible functions of grammaticalized speech act verbs found in Chinese dialects, including Taiwanese Southern Min, Cantonese, and Beijing Mandarin Chinese (Chappell 2008: 49).¹

- (2) a. quotative marker or complementizer; marker of embedded questions
- b. conditional conjunction
- c. reason or purpose conjunction
- d. causal conjunction
- e. topic marker
- f. discourse marker at clause-initial or clause-final positions

2.2 Grammaticalization of 说 and 讲 in SMC

In SMC, both 说 and 讲 are frequently used as speech act verbs. The functions of 说 and 讲 in

SMC will be examined in this section based on a corpus of contemporary Spoken Singapore Mandarin Chinese. The spoken corpus consists of around 0.54 million of Chinese characters transcribed from five local variety shows (46 episodes in total) broadcasted in year 2012 to 2015. The corpus finds 1,658 instances of 说 and 1,085 instances of 讲, with the former approximately 1.5 times more frequent than the latter. This study randomly selected about 30% of the samples, i.e. 500 instances of 说 and 300 instances of 讲 for a close examination.

As shown in Table 1, 说 and 讲 can be classified into four major types according to their functions identified from the corpus examples: (a) as a speech act verb; (b) as part of a lexical word; (c) as part of a grammatical sequence; (d) as a (semi-)complementizer. All functions in (2) are found with 说 in SMC, but not necessarily with 讲 in SMC. The rest of this section will introduce the similarities and differences between 说 and 讲.

Function		说	讲
(a) Speech act verb		208 (41.6%)	210 (70%)
(b) As a part of a lexical word		35 (7%)	35 (11.7%)
(c) As a part of a grammatical sequence	(i) Topic marker	11 (2.2%)	9 (3%)
	(ii) Sentential adverbial	9 (1.8%)	3 (1%)
	(iii) Discourse marker of self-evident assertion, warning, etc.	41 (8.2%)	43 (14.3%)
	(iv) Conjunction introducing condition, purpose, reason, etc.	84 (16.8%)	0 (0%)
(d) (Semi-)complementizer		112 (22.4%)	0 (0%)
Total		500 (100%)	300 (100%)

Table 1 Functions of 说 and 讲 in SMC

Table 1 shows that 说 and 讲 in SMC share several major functions. First, both 说 and 讲 can be used as a speech act verb. They can take an object (3a), introduce a direct quotation (3b), or a reported speech (3c). They behave like typical verbs in that they can be negated (e.g., 不说 'not to say'), reduplicated (e.g., 说说 'say a bit'), suffixed

¹ See Chappell (2008) for a summary of all functions from studies such as Lord (1976), Hock (1982), Saxena (1988), and Heine and Kuteva (2005).

with aspectual markers (e.g., 说着 ‘saying’), or take a resultative complement (e.g., 说出来 ‘speak out’).

- (3) a. 你其实你不用**说**太多话 (jxhxdbt-ep8) ‘You... actually you do not need to say too many words.’
b. 她一直**说**我只要名牌包包 (jxhxdbt-ep5) ‘She kept saying ‘I only want designer bags.’’
c. 他还**说**我是上天赐给他的礼物 (jxhxdbt-ep4) ‘He said I am the gift for him from the heaven.’

Second, both 说 and 讲 are also found as a morpheme in lexical words such as 说话/讲话 ‘say’, 说法 ‘explanation’, and 讲解 ‘explanation; to explain’. Third, as shown in (c) of Table 2, both 说 and 讲 can occur in fixed collocations to perform a variety of functions: (i) as a topic marker, e.g., 对女生来说 ‘as for girls’ and 对我来讲 ‘as for me’, (ii) as a sentential adverbial, e.g., 总的来说/一般来讲 ‘generally speaking’, (iii) as a discourse marker (e.g., 我跟你讲/跟你说 ‘I say to you’) to express speaker’s self-assertion (4a) or warning (4b).

- (4) a. 你会后悔的, **我跟你讲** (xfz8z-ep5) ‘You will regret it. I say to you.’
b. 我要吐了, **我跟你讲**快吐了 (xfz8z-ep1) ‘I’m going to vomit. I say to you. I’m going to vomit.’

Nonetheless, differences are also found between the two speech act verbs. Here I highlight three major ones. First, while both can function as a speech act verb, the majority of 讲 (70%) is used as a speech act verb, whereas the same only goes for less than half (41.6%) of 说. Second, as presented in Table 1, 说 can collocate with a variety of conjunctions introducing clauses such as condition (如果说/比方说 ‘if X’), purpose (所以说 ‘so that X’), and reason (因为说 ‘because X’), but 讲 is not found in such collocations. Third, a good number of 说 (22.4%) is found as a (semi-)complementizer, but 讲 does not have such a use. All these three differences suggest that 说 is used less often as a verb and more as a functional word, and 说 has acquired more grammatical functions than 讲. In other words, 说 has travelled much fur-

ther than 讲 in the path of grammaticalization. Due to space constraints, the next section will discuss in more detail only the third difference between 说 and 讲 in SMC, i.e. as a (semi-)complementizer.

3 说 and 讲 as complementizers in SMC

3.1 Speech act verbs functioning as complementizers

The grammaticalization of speech act verbs into a complementizer has been observed in different languages, particularly the language families in South and Southeast Asia and Africa (Chappell 2008). Where Chinese is concerned, Chappell (2008) points out that the speech act verbs in Taiwan Southern Min, Taiwanese Mandarin, and Beijing Mandarin have reached an advanced stage of grammaticalization, those in Cantonese and Hakka are more at the incipient stage, whereas MMC and other dialects such as Shanghainese Wu and Changsha Xiang are seldom found with any complementizer.

Both Fang (2006) and Chappell (2008) propose that speech act verbs in Chinese dialects undergo two major stages on the way of grammaticalization into complementizers.² Take Fang’s (2006) investigation of 说 in Beijing Mandarin as an example. At the first stage, 说 occurs after another speech act verb and functions as a semi-complementizer, e.g., “告诉我 ‘tell me’ + 说 + clause” in (5a). At this stage, either the speech act verb and its object (e.g., 告诉我) or 说 can be deleted without affecting the meaning. At the second stage, 说 occurs after a non-speech act verb and functions as a complementizer, e.g., 认为 ‘think’ + 说 + clause in (5b). At this stage, 说 no longer expresses any speech act. Furthermore, only 说, but not the matrix verb 认为, can be deleted without affecting the meaning.³

² Fang (2006) and Chappell (2008) adopt different terms for the grammatical status of speech act verbs at different stages of grammaticalization. According to Fang (2006), the speech act verbs become a quotative marker in the first stage and a semi-complementizer in the second stage, but according to Chappell (2008), the speech act verbs are considered a semi-complementizer in the first stage, and a complementizer in the second stage. This study follows Chappell (2008).

³ In addition to the two stages, Fang’s (2006) study of Beijing Mandarin proposes a third stage, where 说 occurs after a noun

- (5) a. 到了前两天, 他忽然来了, 告诉我说, 他在别处借着银子了, 这个银子他不用了。(谈论新篇) (Fang 2006: 110(6)) ‘When it was two days ago, he came suddenly, telling me that he had borrowed money from somewhere else and would not use this money.’
- b. 有很多人, 他们就认为说, 这得政府给我们解决, 我们下岗不是我们自己的错儿。(时空连线) (Fang 2006: 111 (13)) ‘There are many people; they would think that the government should solve the issue for us, as it is not our fault to be laid off.’

Chappell (2008: 54) proposes an implicational hierarchy of verb types that may co-occur with complementizers. As illustrated in (6), the hierarchy consists of five types of verbs from left to right. If a verb type in the hierarchy can co-occur with a complementizer, the verb types on the left of the given verb type can also co-occur with the complementizer. The hierarchy also indicates that the more grammaticalized a complementizer is, the more verb types it can co-occur with. For instance, a complementizer that can co-occur with Type (a-d) has reached a higher degree of grammaticalization than a complementizer that can only co-occur with Type (a-c).

- (6) (a) speech act verbs < (b) cognition and perception verbs < (c) stative and emotion verbs < (d) modal verbs < (e) factive verbs in general

According to Chappell (2008), the verb types in (6) are found to collocate with quotative complementizers in a variety of languages across various language families like Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Iranian, Dravidian and Malayo-Polynesian (see more in Chappell 2008). Of the two standard Mandarin (MMC and TMC) and eight Chinese dialects

(Southern Min, Cantonese, Beijing Mandarin, Sixian Hakka, Changsha Xiang, Nanchang Gan, Shanghainese Wu, and Huojia Jin) that Chappell (2008) has investigated, the speech act verb 讲 (pronounced as *kóng*) in (Taiwanese) Southern Min has grammaticalized to the highest degree. It is found to co-occur with verbs from Type (a-d), that is, speech act verbs, cognition and perception verbs, stative and emotion verbs, and modal verbs. On the contrary, the speech act verbs in MMC and a few Chinese dialects (Xiang, Gan, Wu, and Jin) have not been grammaticalized to any degree and they typically do not co-occur with any verb type in (6).

3.2 Speech act verbs functioning as (semi-)complementizers in SMC

As presented in Table 1, of the 500 instances of 说 in SMC, 22.4% (i.e. 112 instances) function as a (semi-)complementizer. Among them, two instances are identified where 讲 and 说 form a (semi-)complementizer compound. In the following, I will first introduce the 110 cases where 说 alone is used as a (semi-)complementizer before discussing 讲说.

Table 2 presents the types of verbs that can occur before the (semi-)complementizer 说 in SMC. Recall that in Chappell’s (2008) study, 讲 in Taiwanese Southern Min is the most grammaticalized complementizer of all Mandarin varieties and dialects investigated, but it is only found to co-occur with four types of verbs in (6), i.e. Type (a-d). Table 2 suggests that 说 in SMC is much more grammaticalized than 讲 in Taiwanese Southern Min; 说 is not only found with all the five verb types in (6), but also has been extended to collocating with common action verbs such as 导致 ‘cause’ (7a), 试过 ‘try’ (7b), and 确保 ‘ensure’ (7c), i.e. type (f) in Table 2. The extension to common action verbs suggests that 说 has further generalized and productively functions as a complementizer that links a clause with a matrix verb.

Another interesting use of the speech act verbs in SMC is the formation of 讲 and 说 into a compound (semi-)complementizer. As introduced earlier, 讲 in SMC is not used as a complementizer. However, two instances are found where 讲 and 说 have become a compound and carry the function of a (semi-)complementizer. The two instances are

and functions to introduce an appositive clause for the noun. For instance, the clause 上电视演戏 ‘act on TV’ in (i) is appositive of the noun 机会. While being linguistically interesting, in these cases, 说 functions as a complementizer that links a noun complement with a noun, which thus differs from Fang’s (2006) first two stages where 说 links a verb complement with a verb. In addition, because 说 in SMC is not found as a noun clause complementizer, such a function will not be explored in more detail in this paper.

- (i) 好不容易有个机会, 说上电视演戏, 结果她还不让去 (Fang 2006: 113, (23)) ‘Finally there was an opportunity that I could act on TV, but she did not allow me to go.’

given in (8). In (8a), the main VP 通知往生者 ‘inform the dead’ that by itself expresses a speech act, so the presence of 讲说 is optional and it only functions as a (semi-)complementizer. In (8b), the factive verb 知道 is the matrix verb, and 讲说 should be analyzed as a complementizer that introduces the clause object of the matrix verb.⁴

Table 2 Types of verb that occur before (semi-)complementizer 说

Verb type	Example	Freq.
(a) Speech act verbs	讲 ‘say’, 问 ‘ask’, 投诉 ‘complain’, 提到 ‘mention’, 承认 ‘admit’	18 (16.4%)
(b) Cognition/perception verbs	觉得 ‘feel’, 发现 ‘find’, 以为 ‘think’, 想 ‘think’	25 (22.7%)
(c) Stative/ copular/ emotion verbs	代表 ‘mean’, 是 ‘is’, 担心 ‘worry’	39 (35.5%)
(d) Modal verbs	想 ‘want’, 不会 ‘will not’, 可以 ‘can’	15 (13.6%)
(e) Factive verbs	知道 ‘know’, 误解 ‘misunderstand’	7 (6.4%)
(f) Common action verbs	导致 ‘cause’, 试过 ‘try’, 确保 ‘ensure’	6 (5.5%)
Total		110 (100%)

- (7) a. 我就是觉得是一个基因的关系所以这会导致说他们在情感理解度会比较细腻一些。(jxhxdbt-ep2) ‘I indeed think it is something genetic, so that it causes a consequence that they are relatively more sensitive in understanding emotions.’
 b. 你要确保说这段感情是可以持续下去而不是约出来然后是个一夜情。(jxhxdbt-ep8) ‘You should ensure that the relationship can be continued, but not asking her out for a one night stand.’
 c. 那有没有试过说你们在洗的时候啊, 纽扣啊、拉链啦, 还是什么东西洗掉了, 你们会负责?(mcskcs-ep1) ‘Have you tried that

you will be responsible for the buttons, zippers, or others that fall off during laundry?’

- (8) a. 我们要通知往生者讲说要迁移他出来, 到新的地方去了。(mcskcs-ep3) ‘We need to inform the dead that we are going to move him out to a new place.’
 b. 所以看的话, 我们大概就知道讲说这年份的话, 就是大概多久的时间了。(mcskcs-ep3) ‘So if by looking at it, we may know that as for time, how long it has been.’

3.3 Factors motivating the extended uses of 说 and 讲 in SMC

The previous sections have shown that in SMC, 说 has become more grammatical than 讲. This section argues that the extended uses are motivated by both language-external and language-internal factors.

As introduced in Section 1, while SMC shares with major linguistic features with MMC, at the same time, it has been influenced by local languages and dialects. Where language-external factors are concerned, the contact of SMC with Southern Min is probably the major reason for the grammatical extension of 说 in SMC.⁵ However, it should be noted that while both MMC and Southern Min have been involved in the case of the speech act verbs in SMC, neither of them plays the sole or the dominant role.

According to previous studies (Chappell 2008, cf. Sui 2007, Xuan 2011), 说 in MMC is the major speech act verb but it has not yet started developing the function of being a complementizer. On the contrary, 讲 is the major speech act verb in Southern Min, and as shown in Chappell (2008), it is the most grammaticalized speech act verb in all the Chinese dialects that she investigated. In this sense, if SMC was heavily influenced by MMC, 说 in SMC would have not grammaticalized because its counterpart 说 in MMC is not grammaticalized.

⁴ Note that the corpus examples include another 11 cases where 讲 and 说 occur together, but in these cases, the two do not form a compound; rather, 讲 functions as a speech act verb and 说 as a semi-complementizer, as in (i).

(i) 你跟小玲讲说她那个裙子太短 (jxhxdbt-ep6) ‘Please tell Xiao Ling that her dress is too short.’

⁵ Although Cantonese and Hakka are two other dialects spoken in Singapore in addition to Min (e.g., Southern Min, Teochew, Hainanese), the major speech act verbs in both dialects (话 in Cantonese and 讲 in Hakka) have not reached a high degree of grammaticalization according to Chappell (2008) and it is thus unlikely that these two dialects have influenced the use of 说 and 讲 in SMC.

On the other hand, if SMC was heavily influenced by Southern Min in this regard, it would have been 讲, rather than 说, in SMC that acquired the function of complementizer, because of how 讲 is the major speech act verb and how grammaticalized it is in Southern Min. Therefore, this study proposes that the grammaticalization of 说 in SMC has been induced by the interactions between MMC and Southern Min: SMC took the verb form 说 from MMC but followed 讲 in Southern Min in terms of grammaticalization.

In addition to the external factors, SMC also exhibits features that can only be ascribed to language-internal factors, that is, the motivation that leads to variations and changes by the properties of a language itself and no obvious external factor is identifiable in the process. As introduced in Section 3.3, 说 in SMC has grammaticalized to a degree that is higher than all other Chinese varieties, as it can co-occur with the broadest range of verbs. Therefore, even though 说 in SMC may have started its grammaticalization process following 讲 in Southern Min, it has surpassed the latter on the path of grammaticalization.⁶ Furthermore, the compound (semi-)complementizer 讲说 has not been observed in any other Mandarin varieties or Chinese dialects, which is thus probably a feature that is unique developed in SMC. As no language contact or other external factors are clearly identifiable, both the processes, the grammaticalization beyond 讲 in Southern Min and the formation of the compound (semi-)complementizer, could be consequences of the internal development of SMC.

4 Conclusion and future studies

This study investigated the extended grammatical uses of speech act verbs 说 and 讲 in SMC. It found that 说 has been more grammatically extended than 讲 and proposed that the extension could have been motivated by both language-external and language-internal factors. Nonethe-

less, this study has only covered 30% of the whole data available, more findings may be possible when more data is analyzed. Furthermore, due to space limit, this study has not discussed in more depth a few equally significant issues, including both the verbal and grammatical uses of 讲 in SMC and the discourse functions of 说 and 讲 in SMC. These issues will be explored in future studies.

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⁶ In TMC, 说 is also the major speech act verb and it can be used as a complementizer, which thus may present a case similar to 说 in SMC. However, unlike 说 in SMC, according to Chappell (2008), previous studies (e.g., Cheng 1997) find that 说 in TMC is less grammaticalized than 讲 in Southern Min.